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LINK MECHANISM TO DETERMINE
THE POSITION AND DIRECTION
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LINK MECHANISM TO DETERMINE THE POSITION AND DIRECTION

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

a)Field of the Invention

The present invention is a link mechanism to determine a position and direction in three dimensional space. Such a link mechanism is applicable to determine the position and direction of a surgical assist apparatus, an end effector of a robot (manipulator) or the like.

b)Description of the Related Art

In MR/T (magnetic resonance and therapy), fusion of diagnosis and treatment, it is necessary that the presence and function of a medical equipment do not generate artifacts (such as noises and ghost) on the image. The mutual influence between a medical equipment and MRI is called MR compatibility.

Surgical assist robots are expected to be used in MR/T. However, since robot mechanism generally uses many metal components such as steel components, electromagnetic motors, electric sensors and the like, it has been difficult to realize MR compatibility. In particular, the end effector, which is used near to a patient, is required to have a very small magnetic susceptibility and low electrical noise radiation. It is therefore difficult to use a complicated mechanism, active mechanical elements such as motors, and various types of sensors.

Under such restrictions, surgical assist robot for MR/T must realize a mechanism to establish, for a robotic arm segment, at least the position (x y z orthogonal coordinates) and angles θ and ϕ (measured from the center of a coordinate axes system as, respectively, azimuth and elevation) to define the direction in three-dimensional space. It is also desired that the end effector is cleanable and sterilizable. The end effector is also required to be simple and compact so as not to interrupt the view field and the work area of the surgeon. In addition, the output power of an actuator should be as small as possible to maintain safety.

There are many conventional mechanisms to define the position (in terms of the coordinate axes x y z) and angles θ and ϕ . A typical example of such mechanisms is an arm type robot. The arm type robot uses a number of arm links interconnected by joints.

The arm type robot usually has actuators at the joints, otherwise it employs wire mechanism, shaft, and so on to transmit the driving power. The actuator makes it difficult to maintain MR compatibility, and inhibits cleaning and sterilization unless a water-proof process is performed strictly. Since the transmission mechanism is composed from many parts and is mechanically complicated, it requires a number of power transmission components so that it is mechanically complicated and a power loss cannot be neglected.

A parallel link mechanism, typically a hexa pod type robot, can be designed to place actuators remotely from the end effector. However, since links are concentrated near to, or at the end effector, the mechanical structure is complicated.

By designing the end effector to be lengthy, it may be MR compatible, cleanable and sterilizable.

In this case, however, its precision is degraded and stronger actuators are required. Such an end effector can be complicated and bulky, and consequently interrupt the view field of the surgeons.

Under such circumstances, a link mechanism to determine the position and angles has long been desired, which mechanism has a high precision of position and angle determination, does not require strong actuators, and is mechanically simple for enabling MR compatibility, cleaning and sterilization.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention has been made to accommodate such circumstances. The object of the present invention is to realize a link mechanism for determining the position and angles for an actuator, which mechanism has a high precision of position and angle determination, does not require strong actuators, and is mechanically simple to accommodate MR compatibility, cleaning and sterilization, and in which an end effector does not interrupt the field of view of the surgeon.

To achieve the above object, the invented link mechanism has the following features: an axial rod; and two spherical bearings to support the axial rod, the two spherical bearings being capable of changing positions of the links of the mechanism, wherein the motion of one of the two spherical bearings relative to the axial rod along the axis of the rod R is constrained, and the other of the two spherical bearings can travel along the axial rod R.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of an implementation of an end effector of a robot, in accordance with a link mechanism based on this invention.

Figure 2 is a front view of the link mechanism of the embodiment.

Figure. 3 is a diagram illustrating the motion of spherical bearings.

Figure. 4 is a diagram showing a relation among the positions and directions of spherical bearings P_1 and P_2 and an axial rod R.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

An embodiment of the invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

In Fig. 1, reference numeral 11 generally represents a robot end effector. A link mechanism of the invention is assembled in this robot end effector 11. The end effector 11 has a pair of elongated arms 12 and 13. This pair of arms 12 and 13 cooperatively maneuver to work on a subject. The base portion 14 of the arm 12 is fixed to the outer wheel 3(1) or the inner wheel 2(1), shown in Figs. 2 and 3, of the spherical bearing P_1 of the link mechanism 1 of this invention to be described later, whereas the base portion 15 of the other arm 13 is fixed to the outer wheel 3(2) or the inner wheel 2(2) of the spherical bearing P_2 .

As shown in Figures. 1, 2 and 3, the link mechanism 1 of this invention is composed of two spherical bearings P_1 and P_2

and an axial rod R which is a rigid element interconnecting the spherical bearings P_1 and P_2 .

The spherical bearing P_1 travels in three dimensional space (or in a partial space thereof), whereas the position of the spherical bearing P_2 is constrained in three dimensional space or in a two-dimensional plane (or in a partial space or plane thereof) relative to the spherical bearing P_1 .

Each of the spherical bearings P_1 and P_2 is composed of the inner wheel 2(1), 2(2) respectively and the outer wheel 3(1), 3(2) respectively. The inner and outer wheels 2(1) and 3(1) of the bearing P_1 , and similarly for the bearing P_2 , share a common centroid so that they rotate relative to each other around this point. It is a common specification of widely available spherical bearings. The axial rod R is fixed to the inner wheel 2(1) or outer wheel 3(1) of the spherical bearing P_1 which wheel is not fixed to the arm 12. The axial rod R is fixed neither to the inner wheel 2(2) nor to the outer wheel 3(2) of the spherical bearing P_2 . The spherical bearing P_2 can therefore slide along the axial rod R as P_2 moves.

This link mechanism 1 can be made of only passive mechanical elements. Although sensors are not essential to determine the position and angles, such sensors may be used.

The spherical bearings P_1 and P_2 are driven by drivers (not shown). Such drivers and a method of determining the positions of the spherical bearings P_1 and P_2 may be any desired drivers and method.

The determination of the position and direction of the axial rod R of the link mechanism 1 constructed as above is accomplished as follows.



The representative three-dimensional coordinate (x y z) of the whole link mechanism 1 is defined by the position of the spherical bearing P_1 , and at the same time, the direction (angles θ and ϕ of the axial rod R is determined from a motion of the spherical bearing P_2 relative to the spherical bearing P_1 .

As the spherical bearing P_2 is driven, it has a relative displacement along of the axial rod R. To allow this displacement, it is necessary that the spherical bearing P_2 can slide along the axial rod R.

Figure 4 is a diagram showing relation of the spherical bearings P_1 , P_2 and the axial rod R in terms of their position and direction. The angles ϕ and θ of the polar coordinate system satisfy the following equations: $x' = r \cos \phi \sin \theta$

$$y' = r \sin \phi \sin \theta$$

$$z' = r \cos \theta$$

where

$$x' = x_2 - x_1$$

$$y' = y_2 - y_1$$

$$z' = z_2 - z_1$$

$$r^2 = x'^2 + y'^2 + z'^2$$

wherein

r: distance between P_1 and P_2 on the axis R

x_2 : coordinate value of P_2 on the x axis of xyz coordinate

y_2 : coordinate value of P_2 on the y axis of xyz coordinate

z_2 : coordinate value of P_2 on the z axis of xyz coordinate

x_1 : coordinate value of P_1 on the x axis of xyz coordinate

y_1 : coordinate value of P_1 on the y axis of xyz coordinate

z_1 : coordinate value of P_1 on the z axis of xyz coordinate



θ : angle of R measured from x axis of x-z plane

ϕ : angle of R measured from y axis of y-z plane

The length of the axial rod R should be longer than the maximum length of r.

In practice, the width of the spherical bearings P_1 and P_2 along the axial direction is additionally required. If r becomes longer than the length of the axial rod R, the spherical bearing P_2 is dismounted from the axial rod R.

The link mechanism of this invention can be composed from substantially only two spherical bearings and one axial rod. These components can be made of paramagnetic material having small magnetic susceptibility, such as ceramics, glass fiber reinforced material, carbon fiber reinforced material, wood, and non-ferrous metal. Active mechanical elements and sensors are not essential. This link mechanism has excellent characteristics in MR compatibility, and is readily detachable, cleanable and sterilizable.

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